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SUMMERSVILLE MAN SENTENCED TO PRISON ON CHILD PORNOGRAPHY CHARGE

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – Aaron Shane Ballew, 33, of Summersville, Nicholas County, West Virginia, was sentenced to 10 years in prison yesterday by United States District Judge Thomas E. Johnston for possession of child pornography. Ballew pleaded guilty in September 2010 to the offense. On December 30, 2008, from a computer in his Summersville home, Ballew admitted to distributing more than 600 images and videos depicting minors engaged in sexually explicit conduct, that is, actual or simulated sexual intercourse and the lascivious exhibition of the genitals and pubic area of the minors. The defendant admitted to using a peer to peer file sharing program to distribute the explicit images to an undercover agent working with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (“FBI”) in Maryland. On March 1, 2010, the FBI executed a search warrant on Ballew’s Nicholas County home that revealed thousands of explicit images and videos of children on his personal computer. Ballew further admitted that he knew the images and videos constituted child pornography. The images and videos possessed by Ballew had also been shipped and transported in interstate and foreign commerce by means that included a computer.

United States Attorney Booth Goodwin stated, “Any crime that involves the sexual exploitation of a child is sickening and should not be tolerated. Fighting crimes against children will always be a top priority of my office and we will continue to work in conjunction with our law enforcement partners at every level, to ensure that offenders are held accountable and punished for this type of conduct.”

During sentencing, the Court noted that possession of children pornography is not a victimless crime as children who are victims of child pornography often need extensive counseling to address the psychological damage. With respect to the chat logs found on Mr. Ballew’s computer, Judge Johnston noted that these logs represented “unguarded moments that were very detailed and very disturbing.” As part of his sentence, the Court recommended that Mr. Ballew be evaluated for participation in a sex offender psychological program within the Bureau of Prisons.

The investigation for this case was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Assistant United States Attorney Thomas Ryan handled the prosecution.

This case is being brought as part of Project Safe Childhood. In February 2006, the Department of Justice created Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative designed to protect children from online exploitation and abuse. Led by the United States Attorneys Offices, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to better locate, apprehend, and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as identify and rescue victims. For more information about cases and related activities please visit www.usdoj.gov/usao/wvs/ and www.projectsafechildhood.gov.

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BECKLEY FEDERAL INMATE SENTENCED TO ADDITIONAL PRISON TIME ON WEAPONS CHARGE

BECKLEY, W.Va. – A Beckley federal corrections inmate was sentenced to 27 months in prison yesterday by United States District Judge Irene C. Berger for possessing contraband (weapons). Markeith Loyd, 35, previously pleaded guilty to possessing two ice pick-like homemade weapons while in federal custody. On April 2, 2010, Loyd, while incarcerated at the Federal Correctional Institution in Beckley, was subject to a search of his person. Staff members at the federal prison discovered the weapons in the inmate's hair. The first weapon had a white cloth handle and measured six and one half inches in length. The second weapon had a black cloth handle and measured seven inches in length. The items were contraband in that they were prohibited objects designed and intended to be used as weapons by the inmate.

The Bureau of Prisons conducted the investigation. Special Assistant United States Attorney Debbie Stevens handled the prosecution.

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PARKERSBURG MAN SENTENCED TO PRISON ON DRUG CHARGES

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – Damon Thomas Brannan, 38, of Parkersburg, was sentenced to eight years in federal prison yesterday by United States District Court Judge Thomas E. Johnston for the distribution of a quantity of cocaine base. On June 25, 2009, a confidential informant working with the Parkersburg Narcotics Task Force arranged to purchase \$400 worth of cocaine base from Brannan's co-defendant, Courtney Marie White. The cocaine base was subsequently delivered to the informant by Brannan. The cocaine base was tested by the West Virginia State Police Forensic Laboratory and determined to be approximately 2.97 grams of cocaine base, also known as "crack."

At sentencing, the Court acknowledged Brannan's prior felony convictions in California for unlawful sexual intercourse with a minor and grand theft from a person. As a result, the Court applied the "career offender" enhancement under the United States Sentencing Guidelines before imposing the sentence.

Brannan's co-defendant, Courtney Marie White of Columbus, Ohio, entered a guilty plea to possession with intent to distribute five grams or more of cocaine base. White is scheduled to be sentenced later this month. In a related case, Joseph Leon Kay of Parkersburg, pleaded guilty to maintaining a place for the distribution of cocaine base and was sentenced in January to 100 months in prison for his assistance to Brannan and White.

In addition to Brannan's prison sentence, he was also ordered to complete three years of supervised release.

The investigation was conducted by the Parkersburg Narcotics Task Force and the West Virginia State Police Forensic Laboratory.

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